



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Public Hearing

Testimony

By

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University of Connecticut

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding Raised Bill 5031, *An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses*. My name is Barbara O'Connor and I am the University's newly appointed Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police. Although I do not officially commence employment with the University until March 9, 2012, given the importance of this issue, I wanted to be here today.

With me today are Elizabeth Conklin, the University's Title IX Coordinator and Interim Associate Vice President of the Office of Diversity and Equity, and Nicole Fournier Gelston, a legal specialist in the University of Connecticut's Attorney General's office.

The University appreciates the legislature's interest in ensuring that Connecticut's institutions of higher education are doing their part to raise awareness of the prevalence of sexual assaults on college campuses and to afford appropriate assistance to the victims of such sexual assault. As the incoming Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police, I am committed to continuing and further developing the close partnership that the UConn Police has developed with the UConn community and administration to respond appropriately and swiftly to reports of sexual assault.

UConn's longstanding practices in response to sexual assault reflect a difficult but important balance between the needs and concerns of victims, the University's ethical responsibility to provide a safe campus environment, and the existing legal framework under which the University is required to operate. This legal framework includes several critical components: (1) Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and its implementing regulations ("Title IX"); (2) the federal Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act ("Clery Act"); and (3) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"). Each of these regulations proscribes very specific protocols that Universities must follow when responding to sexual assault.

While we would be happy to discuss the numerous complexities and requirements of these Federal laws and regulations and how they would interact with proposed state legislation in this area, we thought it

would be the best use of today's time to describe some of UConn's current initiatives in this important area. For that discussion, I would like to turn the conversation to the University's Title IX Coordinator, Elizabeth Conklin.

In recognition of the complex regulatory scheme and the importance of prevention of and response to sexual assault on campus, the University of Connecticut has adopted an institution-wide comprehensive Sexual Assault Response Policy that demonstrates the University's longstanding commitment and approach to responding to victims of sexual assault on campus in compliance with its ethical and legal obligations. The Sexual Assault Response Policy, which supplements the University's longstanding Policy Statement on Harassment, assists University employees in responding appropriately to reports of sexual assault, including providing information to victims about contacting the police and receiving medical treatment and other critical support services. The policy also promotes a safe campus environment by facilitating on-campus disciplinary processes and involving law enforcement officials in conformity with applicable laws and regulations.

In terms of victim services, members of UConn's longstanding "Community Response Team" work closely with UConn administration and each other to provide a wide range of assistance and support to victims of sexual assaults on campus. This includes, but is not limited to, providing assistance to a victim who decides to press charges with the police and/or to pursue disciplinary action against the alleged perpetrator on campus. Members of the response team additionally are in a position to provide counseling and mental health services, medical assistance, and other on-campus assistance, such as modifications to class and living schedules. Presently, UConn's Community Response Team includes the UConn Police, the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut, Student Health Services, Counseling and Mental Health Services, the Title IX Coordinator, the Office of Community Standards, the Office of Student Services and Advocacy, the Department of Residential Life, the Women's Center, and the Violence against Women Prevention Program. Each of these member organizations is experienced with providing services to victims, and each has worked, and continues to work, in close partnership with the UConn Police. In addition, these University organizations provide education and prevention efforts throughout the year, including discussing issues of sexual assault and consent during orientation and First Year Experience classes, and also holding various ongoing educational events aimed at preventing sexual assault. We are excited to see these efforts continue and expand, in close collaboration with the UConn Police under Chief O'Connor's leadership.

In summary, the policies and response protocols we have outlined today have been developed at UConn with great attention to and mindfulness of existing state and federal regulations. In addition, we have closely followed and implemented best practices as they have developed among leading institutions of higher education nationwide and also statewide.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today on this complex, important and difficult issue, and we also would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the General Assembly's long-standing support for UConn. We would be happy to answer any questions.